

DoD and VA Joint Simulation Programs Foster Collaboration and Readiness

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Three joint simulation programs between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have been held in recent months, building on a partnership that began in 2018 to better train dental residents in VISN 12. The first joint in-situ simulation program was conducted at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Chicago, IL, in October 2021, with participants from both Jesse Brown VAMC and the Naval Medicine Readiness Training Command (NMRTC) Great Lakes. This partnership, spearheaded by SimLEARN faculty Mary Sturgeon, residency program directors Dr. Susie Chung, and CDR Jonathan Negron, along with simulation team members Craig Addison and John Holanday, has since expanded to include multiple professions and military branches.

Learners engage in hands-on training during the Joint Emergency Preparedness Course at Lovell FHCC. From left to right: LT Veronica Phen, Karin Clifton, and Talha Karimi. (Photograph courtesy of LCDR True Xiong and Mr. David Sutter)

Over the years, the partnership has grown, with additional joint simulations held in January 2021 and March 2023 at NMRTC Great Lakes. These programs have demonstrated the value of joint in-situ simulation

training, helping DoD and VA residents, faculty, and staff better understand each other's roles and collaborate effectively. The success of these collaborations has led to expanded training opportunities for Navy reservists and other military branches, as well as staff from VA facilities across the country.

CDR Daniel J. Honl, DDS, Oral Surgeon, and Director for Dental Services at NMRTC Great Lakes, is a strong advocate for these collaborations. As Associate Director for Dental Services at Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center (FHCC), the largest dental command in the world, CDR Honl emphasizes the importance of readiness and interagency collaboration. Lovell FHCC, the only joint DoD/VA facility in the world, plays a crucial role in training Navy recruits and military personnel to maintain operational readiness. CDR Honl has been instrumental in supporting these joint simulations and recognizes the benefits of working together to train Active Duty, Reserve, and VA staff in critical skills that go beyond traditional roles.

In March 2024, Dr. Mary Sturgeon organized a Joint Emergency Preparedness Training Course at Lovell FHCC for dental teams, training 10 dental residents and program directors from NMRTC Great Lakes and Jesse Brown VAMC. The course covered essential emergency skills such as airway management, anaphylaxis, opioid overdose, and obtaining IV access. Learners also participated in escape rooms and simulation scenarios focused on medical emergencies and difficult communication, including suicide recognition and intervention. Karin Clifton, ACNP (UCSF/SimLEARN), Kristen Klein, RDH (Iowa City VAMC), Paul Bialkowski, RN (Lovell FHCC) and CDR Daniel Honl, DDS (NMRTC Great Lakes) served as course faculty. The training provided residents and program directors with actionable emergency skills that improve their preparedness for real-life scenarios. In addition, participants received simulation training knowledge that can be applied to future emergency training.



Participants and faculty from the Joint Emergency Preparedness Training Course at Lovell FHCC gather for a group photo following a successful training.

From left to right: CDR Daniel Honl, CDR Shawna Jackson, Karin Clifton, Talha Karimi, LT Lucas Williams, Martin Navarette, Noelle McCollum, Susie Chin, Kristen Klein, Mary Sturgeon, Paul Bialkowski, LT Reyhan Abdelmoniem, LT Veronica Phien, and LCDR True Xiong. (Photograph courtesy of LCDR True Xiong and Mr. David Sutter on 28 March)

Another joint in-situ simulation program was held at the MacDill Air Force Base (AFB) Dental Clinic in Tampa, FL from July 11-12, 2024. SimLEARN worked with the MacDill AFB Simulation and Education Departments to bring together a team of dentists, nurses, anesthetists, and simulation experts. The



Staff and learners from MacDill AFB, Bay Pines VA, Tampa VA, and SimLEARN gather after completing a joint simulation training focused on clinical and operational skills. (Photo courtesy of Airman Monique Stober, MacDill AFB, Tampa, FL)

program featured hands-on skills stations and simulation scenarios designed to enhance clinical and operational abilities. It ended with a final exercise, called a megacode, where participants practiced applying everything they had learned.

Key leaders who supported the program included Ali Rivers, CTR, and Maj Oruaro Idudhe from MacDill AFB, along with LT COL Brent Waldman, Dental Chief at MacDill AFB. They welcomed Dr. Sturgeon, who brought her simulation expertise to the dental staff, and also invited Dr. William Baldwin, Dental Chief at Bay Pines VA, and his team to participate. This collaboration between DoD and VA staff allowed both groups to learn from each other and share best practices. Participants also gained experience in using simulation for improving systems and testing procedures.

Instructors and volunteers included Michelle Rezagui, Karin Clifton, Elizabeth Nunez, Olivia Franklin, and Brian Cavill. Additionally, Janet Sprehe, Program Director of Simulations at James A. Haley VA, helped course director Jessica Feinleib lead SimLEARN's Out of Operating Room Airway Management

(OORAM) course. This course helped MacDill dentists and dental assistants improve their airway management skills, preparing them to handle emergencies during patient sedation.

With the support of CDR Daniel Honl, the Lovell FHCC Dental Command organized the first NMRTC Great Lakes Navy Reserve Joint Simulation Program on July 13-14, 2024. The interprofessional team leading this program included experts from oral surgery, dentistry, clinical psychology, pharmacy, nursing, emergency medicine, trauma, and critical care/pulmonology. CDR Honl collaborated with LT Kyle Livengood, LT Rachel Meyer, CAPT Radadia, LCDR Aaron Weisbrod, retired CAPT Dr. Arnold Delfiner, CAPT Amy Rohs, LCDR Jacob Corlew, LCDR Stein, Amanda Borchers, Mark Bisbee, and Dr. Mary Sturgeon to deliver comprehensive training.



Navy reservists practiced critical emergency skills using a manikin to enhance their preparedness for real-world scenarios.

Forty-nine Navy reservists, including corpsmen, nurses, and physicians, participated in this hands-on program. The training included skills stations and simulation scenarios that focused on mass casualty triage, trauma management, and building mental resiliency. This joint simulation program helped strengthen participants' preparedness and collaboration for high-stakes medical situations.

Left to right: LT Kyle Livengood, Ret CAPT Arnold Delfiner, CAPT Ryan Jack, Amanda Borchers, LCDR Jacob Corlew, and LCDR Christ Stein.

These joint simulation programs exemplify the value of collaboration between DoD and VA, enabling the sharing of resources, knowledge, and expertise to create a more prepared and capable force. By working together and training together, both organizations can enhance their readiness and deliver better care to Active Duty, Reserve, and Veteran patients alike. Through continued collaboration, we are building a stronger, more integrated approach to health care that benefits everyone involved.



Participants and instructors from the first NMRTC Great Lakes Navy Reserve Joint Simulation Program gathered after completing two days of interprofessional training.